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15. UNUSUAL FEEDING ASSOCIATION BETWEEN SIBERIAN CRANE  
*GRUS LEUCOGERANUS* AND WILD BOAR *SUS SCROFA*  
IN KEOLADEO NATIONAL PARK, BHARATPUR, RAJASTHAN

Siberian cranes *Grus leucogeranus* are wetland-dependant birds and unlike other cranes that often forage in dry upland areas near wetlands, they usually forage in ankle deep shallows (Sauey 1985). Three Siberian cranes were observed feeding in dried up areas of wetland in the Keoladeo National Park, Bharatpur, India. The cranes were in areas where the soil appeared ploughed and were observed picking up tufts of grass and putting them aside, and then picking up small items of food. After the cranes had moved away from the foraging sites, we noticed that the area had wet soil and was dug up by boars *Sus scrofa*, as was evident from the hoof marks and droppings of wild boars. All the grass was uprooted; tufts of roots and partly eaten insect larvae were lying all over. A bunch of larvae were wriggling under the tufts of grasses, which were lying all over the dug up areas.

Wild boars are known to feed on roots of grasses and sedges, and also on insects (Prater 1971). They had probably uprooted the grasses to get to these larvae. The cranes took advantage of the ploughing by the wild boars, as they themselves would have found it difficult to uproot the grasses in the dried up area where the soil had hardened after drying. The insect larvae were very small and

individually not of much food value to cranes, but since they were available in abundance, the cranes may have found it profitable to feed on the larvae, which are not on their regular diet. Only the captive bred released birds, which were a part of an experiment to augment the wild population of Siberian cranes, were observed feeding on larvae. It was probably behaviour learnt from sarus cranes, as the Siberian cranes were associated with them more than with the wild Siberian cranes. The captive released birds would often venture out with the sarus cranes to forage in the dry areas. The Siberian cranes are known to feed largely on vegetable matter and occasionally on aquatic insects in their wintering grounds (Ali and Ripley 1983, Vijayan 1991).

Birds are known to benefit from feeding associations with other animals. Egrets *Egretta* spp., drongos *Dicrurus* spp., starlings *Sturnus* spp., mynas *Acridotheres* spp., and many other species follow grazing animals and pick up insects disturbed by the movement of these animals in the grass (Ali and Ripley 1983). However, we have not come across any reports of Siberian cranes, which are largely wetlands birds, getting direct benefit from the action of a terrestrial animal like the wild boar.

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16. COMMON COOT *FULICA ATRA* FROM KYONGNOSLA IN EAST SIKKIM

In early March 2000, there were reports of migrating water birds in groups of 50+ from the Kyongnosla area of east Sikkim (c. 3000 m). On March 15, 2000 one bird that had fallen from the sky from its group of c. 100 birds was caught and taken to a nearby settlement. Mr. Bishnu Sharma, Supervisor, Kyongnosla Alpine Sanctuary, immediately retrieved it and brought it to my office at Deorali, Gangtok the next day in a cardboard carton. The bird was an adult common coot *Fulica atra*. It was alert and active, stabbing at my hand with its bill, and it drank water copiously. It seemed unhurt and had no external injuries. As I had no apparatus to ring or measure it, or take photographs, I took it to my residence at the Forest Colony, Baluakhani, Gangtok (1,800 m) that evening, where it escaped. For over an hour it wandered in the garden before fluttering down to the road and going into the forest scrub further down. I

watched for it till dark and could not find it the next morning.

The common coot, which has a wide distribution range over the Indian subcontinent, has not been recorded from Sikkim so far, though the area is a well known traditional flyway for water birds on return migration northwards in spring (Ali and Ripley 1983; Ali 1962) probably due to paucity of field surveys. This could therefore be considered a new record for Sikkim.

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